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ABSTRACT

Portfolios have been employed for years as evidence of many abilities (e.g., one's best drawings, one's teaching ability). The portfolio allows the individual the opportunity to demonstrate not only his/her best work, but improvement in his/her work. The chair of the Psychology Department at Shenandoah College initiated a portfolio program as a means of: (1) demonstrating the department's use of a continual, internal assessment process; (2) providing department members with a measure of the appropriateness and effectiveness of course content and requirements; and (3) allowing students to identify their best efforts and leave behind a tangible record of their work for later years. The objectives of the portfolio program are presented to continuing and incoming students each fall. Students are also given checklists by which to compare their own portfolios with portfolio requirements. The first major component of the portfolio program is a 50-item, multiple-choice test taken at the beginning of the students' first semester at Shenandoah and again at the completion of the program. The second component consists of written work from every required psychology course, two pieces of non-psychology work, and an audiotape of the students' presentation of their senior thesis statement. This component illustrates the students' gradual accumulation of knowledge about psychology and its methods. Students tend to select their best work from a course, and many rewrite papers before they are placed in the portfolios. (AC)

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THE PORTFOLIO AS A TEACHING AND EVALUATION TOOL

The buzzwords of the 1990's in Higher Education thus far have been accountability and evaluation. Accreditation associations have demanded that institutions, schools and departments all have their own systems of accountability and evaluation. Performance measures have been called for by education experts, lawmakers and consumers. In the midst of these demands and controversies, it is the faculty member who has been called upon to provide the measures which demonstrate educational progress. The strategies for assessment and the implementation of the evaluation process now rest at the individual faculty member level.

At most small Colleges and Universities, faculty members in Psychology departments are dedicated to providing their students with quality learning experiences. Most Psychology departments serve two constituencies, i.e, their own majors and general education requirements. A major focus of the faculty member's time is spent in planning lectures, demonstrations and evaluations for the general education and advanced classes and in addition providing research and practicum experiences for their majors. Little time and energy is left for assessment of programs.

In order to meet the demands of the traditional faculty workload and the increasing demand to assess the educational progress of the students in ones' department, this author considered an approach which would combine the two. A Portfolio Program, monitored and administrated by the faculty and the responsibility of the student, appeared to be an excellent mechanism.

Portfolios have been employed for many years to demonstrate many abilities, e.g., one's best drawings, one's teaching ability. The Portfolio allows the individual the opportunity to selectivity demonstrate one's best work and at the same time demonstrate improvement in one's work.

After attending a conference on evaluating the effectiveness of Psychology and Sociology Departments sponsored by the Appalachian Evaluation Consortium, discussing with colleagues the practicability of such a system and examining the literature on portfolio programs, as Program Chair of the Psychology Department at Shenandoah University, this author initiated a Portfolio Program in August, 1991.

The Portfolio Program serves three main purposes. First, the Portfolio Program allows the Department to demonstrate that a continual, internal assessment process is occurring. Second, it provides the Department members a measure by which we can determine if course content and requirements are appropriate and effective. Third, it allows the student an opportunity to determine what

constitutes their best efforts and leaves a tangible record of their work behind if letters of reference are requested later in one's career.

The objectives and goals of the program are presented to each continuing and incoming student every Fall semester. Students are also presented with checklists - what must be in the portfolio and what is currently in their personal portfolios. As completion of the portfolio is required for graduation, this fall semester meeting is crucial.

The Portfolio Program consists of two major components. The first component is an objective measure. This is a fifty-item, multiple-choice question test. The test is taken at the beginning of the students' first semester at Shenandoah and again upon completion of the program. Although problems exist with this type of measurement, it does allow for an assessment of content knowledge. Student A did not know Freud before they entered, they do upon completion of the program. Many standardized tests and test companies exist to provide this service. Shenandoah decided against the use of these because of the high cost involved. However, as the Program evolves, it is expected that norms provided by the testing services will be employed.

The second component consists of written work from every required Psychology course and two pieces of non-Psychology work. This component also consists of an audio-tape of the students' presentation of their Senior thesis statement. This component is the part of the program which allows the student and the Department to display the gradual accumulation of knowledge about Psychology and the methods of Psychology. A glaring example of educational progress in the discipline exists in almost every portfolio thus far. The papers from the Introductory Psychology courses are very elementary. Although they are "good" papers, i.e., well-written, nicely-typed and adequately referenced, they do not demonstrate any extensive knowledge of the subject matter and methods of Psychology. The papers from any upper-level course, however, demonstrate APA style, a wide-variety of APA journals, a subject matter crucial to Psychology. In almost every case, the gradual emergence of an undergraduate scholar in Psychology is evident. The Department has produced a "product", i.e., definite educational progress can be demonstrated.

The Portfolio Program has been a definite teaching tool. Most students perceive their personal portfolio as the representation of the work in Psychology. Many select their "best" work from a course. Most redo their papers before they are placed in the portfolios. All of the students have accepted the program with a sense of personal responsibility and an opportunity to discuss with their advisor their overall development in the department.